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Polish Middle Eastern Travels Until the End of the 19th Century: Current Research

ABSTRACT

The objective of the article is to summarize the efforts made so far by Polish researchers of pilgrimages to the Holy Land, traveling around Egypt and the Levant. The academic interest in visits of Poles in this part of the Ottoman Empire is relatively fresh, because the first publications on this issue appeared sporadically at the beginning of the 19th century. For several decades, a book by Jan Stanisław Bystron was the main source of knowledge about the presence of Poles in Egypt and the Levant. Scholarly interest in this topic grew in the second half of the 20th century. Despite an abundance of publications, our knowledge of the Polish presence in the Arab part of the Ottoman state is still incomplete. This is mainly due to the limited source materials and the lack of a broad search for archival and museum resources. The rising number of researchers on this subject may change this situation in the long run.

KEYWORDS: Poland, the Levant, pilgrims

STRESZCZENIE

Polskie podróżnictwo bliskowschodnie do końca XIX wieku. Stan badań

Celem artykułu jest próba wstępnego podsumowania dotychczasowych wysiłków polskich badaczy pątnictwa do Ziemi Świętej, podróży po Egipcie i Lewancie. Zainteresowanie pobytem Polaków w tej części Imperium Osmańskiego jest stosunkowo świeże, bowiem pierwsze publikacje z badań nad tym problemem pojawiają się sporadycznie od przełomu XIX i XX wieku. Przez kilka dziesięcioleci głównym źródłem wiedzy o obecności Polaków w Egipcie i Lewancie była książka Jana Stanisława Bystronia. Wzrost zainteresowania tym problemem nastąpił w drugiej połowie XX wieku. Mimo obfitości pojawiających się publikacji nasza wiedza o polskiej obecności w arabskiej części Państwa Otomańskiego nadal jest niepełna. Wynika to przede wszystkim z wąskiej bazy źródłowej, braku szerszych poszukiwań zasobów archiwalnych

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i muzealnych. Wzrastająca liczba badaczy tej problematyki być może w perspektywie dłuższego czasu zmieni tę sytuację.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Polska, Lewant, pielgrzymki

Poles have been traveling to the countries of the Middle East for centuries. For several decades, I have been trying to collect information about Poles living in the Middle East, scattered in various Polish and foreign publications and archives. The material collected so far covers several thousand names of people who have visited this region (Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, the territory of Mesopotamia, and Iran), from the first mentions (before 1139) until basically 1914. I believe that this year marks an important caesura in the history of Polish travels in the Middle East, as the number of trips (most of them gathering several hundred participants) had been rising since the end of the 19th century. These journeys were guided according to preplanned, detailed itineraries and did not allow individuals to see any sites other than those selected by the organizers.

Certainly, these do not include all the Poles who have visited the Middle East throughout history. Some authors of memoirs, when writing about their countrymen who they met, did not mention full names, and were often satisfied with only counting them. For example, in *Letters from Egypt 1903–1904*, August Krasicki (1903–1904, p. 16b) wrote about 12 Poles with whom he celebrated the anniversary of Abbas II Hilmi's accession to the throne. Foreign pilgrims, who rarely noted any Polish surnames, usually limited themselves to the nationality of the foreign pilgrims they met on their way.

The number of Polish pilgrims to the Holy Land fluctuated. Norbert Golichowski (n.d.-b, p. 18), referring to Jukundyn Bielak's notes and his own calculations, estimated that between 1862 and 1890 Palestine was visited by 1,286 Polish women and men, while Anselm Sztainke (1972, p. 188) stated that there were thirty Poles in 1872, fifty in 1875, only thirteen in 1877, seventeen in 1878, thirty-two in 1880, twenty-five in 1883, thirty-five in 1884, and forty in 1885. Golichowski (n.d.-b, p. 18) indicated that the number of Polish groups (caravans) in the 19th century varied (in 1891, the group of Polish pilgrims numbered 52 people). Golichowski (n.d.-c, p. 81a) also noted a gap in the records of Bernardine Fathers at the monastery of St. Salvatore, covering the years 1870–1876.

The traveling Poles came from different social strata, had different educational levels, and practiced different professions. There were not only clergymen, doctors, military personnel, and members of the upper class, but also representatives of the countryside (mainly homesteaders and other rural poor), small craftsmen, and hired workers.

The first documented traces of the presence of Poles in the Holy Land, the most visited area in all historical periods, date back to the 12th century, i.e., the time of the Crusades. According to Jan Stanisław Bystroń (1930) it would have been the year 1147, whereas Reinhold Röhricht (1894, p. 22), referring to a mention in the Silesian diplomatic code (1884, p. 29), writes about Father Otto from the Church of St. Michael, who visited the Holy Land twice before 1139.

The degree of Polish contact with the Middle East has certainly increased significantly since the mid-nineteenth century, when many facilities for tourists and pilgrims traveling to Christian holy places were built, and the demand of the Europeanizing Ottoman Empire and its satellites for professionals—engineers, doctors, and soldiers—grew. Poland, which did not exist in the 19th century on the political map of Europe, yielded a large number of professionals of various trades who emigrated to European countries, Turkey, and Egypt, fleeing political persecution or economic hardship. At that time, scores of Polish emigrants also appeared in Persia and the Caucasus, regions with which Poland had less frequent relationships, constrained mainly to royal envoys or even less numerous trade expeditions.

We cannot say much about the frequency of these contacts, which is mainly due to the extent and quality of the archival sources.

Sources

The basic data came from materials collected by Norbert Golichowski during his work in the Custody of the Holy Land and currently kept in the Provincial Archive of Bernardine Monks in Krakow. These include Norbert Golichowski's personal handwritten memories from his stay in the Holy Land (Golichowski, n.d.-d), descriptions of Palestine (Golichowski, n.d.-b, n.d.-c), and his various notes (Golichowski, n.d.-a). A wealth of information about Polish pilgrims can also be found in his publications (Golichowski, 1892a, 1892b, 1895, 1896). The numerous annotations and incorrect page numbering create a certain difficulty in reading his manuscripts.

Based on entries in guest books in Jerusalem, Norbert Golichowski created a list of people from the Polish land visiting the city, often noting the pilgrims' previous stays in Egypt and their social and geographical background. The list covers mainly nineteenth-century travelers, but also includes information about earlier pilgrims, although we cannot always be sure that they came from the territories of former Poland. Golichowski's criteria of religious denomination (Roman Catholic) and the Slavic wording of the surnames sometimes cause serious problems in identifying the true origin of the pilgrim.

Golichowski used the *Navis Peregrinorum*. This guest book of visitors from Jerusalem, kept in the Franciscan archives, has only been preserved in fragments since 1561. The gaps are 1562–1572, 1575, 1577–1581, 1591–1596, and 1692–1845 (Zimolong, 1938). It was used to identify the names of Polish pilgrims. These extracts were not always accurate. Recently, such a list was published by Olgierd Lenczewski (2019).

The memoirs of the travelers are another very valuable source of information. Unfortunately, the exact number of handwritten memoirs and letters from journeys to the East is unknown; according to my estimates, there are over 200 of them. Some of them have appeared in print, while others circulate as manuscripts. From time to time, news breaks out about the discovery of new documents. Unfortunately, so far no one has attempted to inventory them.

It is still unknown how much material can be found in archival, library, and museum collections outside the present-day borders of Poland. These resources are yet to be explored. Museum repositories are also largely uncatalogued. Perhaps they will contribute little to the research on the inhabitants of the Republic of Poland visiting the Middle East, but they should also be browsed. Perhaps they will allow us to determine whether the donors of oriental objects were in the regions of our interest. Travelers or their families donated imported artifacts to museum collections in the 19th century, which is confirmed by lists of donors and gifts published in journals of scientific societies.

In the case of foreign archives, another problem arises: the spelling conventions of Polish surnames. The individuals who entered the guests' names into the hotel books were often culpable for some distortions in the surnames, so these cannot always be identified with a real Polish name form. Golichowski (n.d.-c, 2, 136 [78a] gloss) complained about the distortions of Polish names in the records of pilgrims in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he noted them meticulously when they were annotated with the label "Polacco" or "Polacca."

As Stefan Kieniewicz (1986, 17, footnote 13)—a prominent expert in the history of the 19th century—reminds us, the alternation of surnames was a major obstacle in identifying travelers and was quite common until the end of the 19th century.

It is also difficult to identify the surnames of travelers when the authors of the memoirs only provide a first name and initials or an abbreviation of the surname. When there are no other sources, this practice very often makes it impossible to even identify the person that the pilgrim met.

I did not manage to access hotel guest books. The names of various hotels frequently appear in the surviving diaries of travelers to the Middle East. Nor do we have guest lists for Egyptian resorts. It seems that most of

the guest books, especially those from the 19th century, have not survived. One unique example is guests' entries from 1920–1935 from the Winter Palace hotel in Luxor published by André B. Wiese (1998).

History of the Research

In the last few decades, Polish scholars have become increasingly interested in the Polish presence in the Middle East. So far, many of the articles that have been published have changed our understanding of this issue. However, the research has so far has focused mainly on the presence of Poles in the Holy Land and Egypt. Other areas of the Arabic Middle East have not received much attention.

Despite the increasing interest, we still do not know when the first Polish wanderers reached these lands, or who they were. Sources from the oldest periods of Polish history have been preserved in fragments. This fact seems to have deterred historians from taking up the subject. Thus, there is still no detailed research on this problem, although the number of publications on Polish travel to the Middle East has recently gone up in Poland. The first attempts to compile lists of Poles visiting the Middle East were made as early as the 19th century (Grzegorzewski, 1896; Baruch, 1901). Until now, the point of reference about Poles in the Middle East was the study by Jan Stanisław Bystron, published in 1930; it was a long, popular essay, written without the benefit or aid of any scientific apparatus.

Research on the presence of Poles in Arabic countries did not expand until decades after that publication. Short studies dealing with the presence of Poles in Iran (Kościałkowski, 1943) and Lebanon (Kościałkowski, 1947) came out in the 1940s. It was the time of World War II, i.e., the period when a large group of Poles in the ranks of the Polish army stayed in the area for several years. In the post-war period, interest in this topic somewhat faded. However, several valuable studies were written: Jan Reychman's books (1972) about Poles in the 19th century visiting the Middle East (without Egypt), and Stanisław Korwin Pawłowski's work (1958) on Polish pilgrims in the Holy Land. Father Janusz Anzelm Sztainke, who published numerous contributions (1972, 1981, 2001)—culminating in an excellent dictionary (Sztainke, 1998, 1999)—devoted a lot of attention to Polish friars serving in the Holy Land.

An important element of this research is the studies devoted to individual Polish travelers visiting the Middle East. From this group of monographs, we should mention the biographies of the Jesuit Father Maksymilian Rylło (Czermiński, 1911–1912), Father Adam Prosper Burzyński (Wiśniewski, 1929), and General Józef Zajączek (Nadzieja, 1975).

Some of these studies are devoted exclusively to the stays of specific people in the Middle East. The greatest contribution in this field was made by Joachim Śliwa, the author of numerous articles focused on the stays of Poles in Egypt (e.g., 1996, 2005, 2010, 2012). It is also worth mentioning the studies on the mission of Father Adam Prosper Burzyński (Włoczyk, 1995), Feliks Boron's travels to the Holy Land (Grodziski, 1984), the Hussarzewskis (Figiel, 2010), and the Potockis (Grzechnik, 2010). Some travelers' journeys merited several descriptions. The "record holder" is probably Juliusz Słowacki's peregrination to the East (Hoesick, 1894; Przybylski, 1982; Weryho, 2001; Łukasiewicz, 2018). Another noteworthy one was the expedition of Count Adam Potocki (Tracz, 2009; Zinkow, 1999; Grabczewska, 2012).

Aleksander Klugman (1994) and Artur Patek (2009, 2016) devoted their publications to the memorabilia that testify to Poles' visits to Palestine.

Recently, Agnieszka Teterycz-Puzio's work on Poles in the Middle Ages who traveled in the footsteps of Jesus in Palestine (2017) was released. In the research on pilgrimages from individual districts of the Republic of Poland, Silesians' pilgrimages to the Holy Land were studied more closely. Halina Manikowska (1995, 2002), later mainly Zbyszko Bednorz (1978), Jan Górecki (2005), and Jerzy Myszor (2017) pursued the issue of medieval pilgrims from Silesia. Joachim Zdrenka (1995, 2002) explored Pomeranian princes' medieval pilgrimages to the Holy Sepulcher.

In Krakow, Wojciech Mruk (2001, 2002, 2005, 2010) has been dealing with the matter of pilgrimages, especially those to the Holy Land in the Middle Ages, for several decades years. Halina Manikowska (2006, 2008) from the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, has also addressed the topic in her research. Additionally, my books about Poles in Egypt until the end of the 19th century should also be listed here (Kaczmarek, 2008, 2018).

Bohdan Baranowski (1950), Jerzy Grobicki (1956), Waław Słabczyński (1973, 1988), Jerzy Pertek (1981), Alojzy Sajkowski (1991), Jacek Knopek (1997, 1999, 2000, 2001), Duc Ha Nguyen (2006), Agnieszka Żal-Kędziora (2010), and Łukasz Burkiewicz (2018) have studied the presence of Poles in the Middle East incidentally. We must also recall Hubert Chudzio's study on the efforts to employ Polish officers in Muhammad Ali's army (2014).

Specialist dictionaries by Anselm Janusz Szteinke (1999), Marek M. Dziekan (1998), Jerzy S. Łątka (2005, 2015), and Joachim Śliwa (2019) also provide valuable insights on the matter. Next are lists of Polish travelers around the world, such as the dictionaries of Stanisław Zieliński (1933, 1935), Józef Hieronim Retinger (1937), and Waław and Tadeusz Słabczyński (1992). Thesauruses also seem to be helpful. An important role is played by the biographical dictionaries of clergymen, like the book

titled Henryk Mross (1995) by Ludwik Gadacz (1985), or military personnel: Jan Pachonński's biographical dictionary of the officers of the Legions (1998–2003), Robert Bielecki's unfinished dictionary of the officers of the November Uprising (1995–1998), the dictionary of the Polish participants of the Hungarian Spring of Nations by István Kovács (2016), Ludwik Hass's Dictionary of Polish Freemasonry (1999), Jan Marian Tyrowicz's Dictionary of Polish Conspirators (1964), and the dictionaries of Polish doctors by Stanisław Kościński (1888) and Piotr Szarejko (1991). Speaking of the biographical dictionaries dedicated to various regions of Poland, I consider the dictionaries of Tadeusz Oracki (1963, 1983) to be of great value. In other dictionaries, not mentioned here, we can also find some facts about Polish travelers visiting the Middle East. The Polish Biographical Dictionary, published since 1935 and still far from complete, is an immensely valuable source of information about individual travelers.

Another group of studies that contain information about the stays of various people in the Middle East are "armorials." Information about the presence of representatives of the aristocracy is shown not only in the multi-volume studies by Wielądsko (1792–1798), Boniecki (1899–1913), Niesiecki (1839–1845), and Uruski (1904–1938), but also in smaller works by Dachnowski (1995).

We can also find mentions of Poles traveling in the Middle East in foreign-language literature. In this regard, the excellent works of the German scholars Titus Tobler (1867) and Reinhold Röhricht (1890, 1894, 1900) are noteworthy. Heinrich Wendt (1916) devoted his book to Silesian pilgrims in the Holy Land. Information about Lithuanians who arrived in Egypt can be found in Aldona Snitkuvienė's publication (2011). The study by Irina Fiedorowa (2014) on the pilgrimage of Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł, "Orphan," is also very useful.

The names of people from the lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were also noted by Carlos de Odrizola y Grimaud (1900, 1905) in the published lists of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher. According to modern research, Polish names also appear in inscriptions placed on ancient monuments of the Near East (Goyon, 1944; Dewachter, 1971; de Keersmaecker, 2001, 2003, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012). However, two more recent Anglo-Saxon studies, the books by Martin R. Kalfatovic (1992) and Izabela Kalinowska (2004), are very disappointing.

Directions for further research

Until now, apart from Stanisław Kościółkowski (1949) and the Krakow Bernardine Father Władysław Waśko, no one has examined the parish

books of churches operating in the former Ottoman empire, which also recorded the Polish faithful whose fate was tied to the East for many years. Archives in the Middle East have not been reviewed from this aspect, either. Also, the diplomatic archives of the countries that had permanent representatives (consuls) in various places of the Ottoman Empire have not yet been consulted. Taking into account the publications of Rudolf Agstner (1993, 1994, 2000, 2018) based on the Austro-Hungarian archives in Egypt and the work of O. Petruninova (Leks 2016), who published the letters of Ivan Leks, the Russian consul in Cairo to his superior in Istanbul, I believe that this must be done.

The 19th- and 20th-century daily press can also provide knowledge about the pilgrims. Unfortunately, it is very incomplete. News on trips abroad or returns was often published in the press, in the section on “social life.” The information these newspapers contain is valuable, as they often provide materials of interest to researchers—for example, the articles by Augustyn Weltzel (1868) and Adam Żarnowski (1980).

Following the example of other countries, Poland has also published specialist magazines devoted to missionary activities in Palestine (*Towarzystwo Grobu Bożego* [Society of the Holy Sepulcher] in the years 1868–1885), or more widely all over the world (*Missyje Katolickie* [Catholic Missions] from the 1880s through the 1930s). The extracts from *Kurier Warszawski* [The Warsaw Courier] (Tyszka, 2001–2012) made by Andrzej Tadeusz Tyszka prove how valuable a resource the daily press is to such research.

This short article probably does not exhaust the topic. The articles and studies cited herein are not a complete bibliography concerning the presence of the inhabitants of the Republic of Poland in the Middle East. So far, no one has compiled one. More contributions on this topic are appearing as interest in this topic grows. However, many topics and materials remain unexplored. Perhaps the appointment in 2020 of a research team on the reception of the East by the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures will lead to more research.

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